

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5890

As of February 6, 2009

Title: An act relating to flexibility in the education system.

Brief Description: Providing flexibility in the education system.

Sponsors: Senators McDermott, McAuliffe, Oemig and Hobbs.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/05/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

Background: Title 28A of the Revised Code of Washington encompasses the laws related to the common schools and establishes the organizational structure of the common school system. ("Common schools" are public schools operating a program for kindergarten through twelfth grade or any part thereof.) Separate chapters define the roles and responsibilities of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), the State Board of Education (SBE), educational service districts (ESDs), and school districts. Other chapters of Title 28A define requirements for health screening and requirements, traffic safety, compulsory school attendance and admission, compulsory course work and activities, awards, and academic achievement and accountability.

Over the years, school districts have asked the Legislature to ease the burden that state mandates have placed on public schools. Deregulation may provide school districts with the flexibility to reallocate resources, personnel, materials, and training time.

Summary of Bill: The following laws in Title 28A RCW relating to policy and program mandates are suspended or delayed, repealed, or required only to the extent funds are available.

The following programs or requirements established by law are each repealed:

- Every student in grades one through eight must receive physical education (PE), and all state high schools must emphasize PE and implement SPI's PE rules.
- Public schools must observe Temperance and Good Citizenship Day. Annually the Office of SPI must produce a related program for teachers.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

- OSPI must develop a family preservation education program model curriculum to be available to each school board. The model should be posted on SPI's website.
- SPI, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Washington State Bar Association must develop a volunteer-based conflict resolution and mediation program for use in community groups.
- If schools operate garden or farms for educational purposes, students must be given the opportunity to be involved and must learn about both organic and conventional growing methods.

The following programs or requirements established by law are suspended until July 1, 2011:

- Each school district must provide or contract for early intervention services for children birth to three and for students with disabilities by September 1, 2009. Programs must be extended to include preschoolers.
- Inter-district transfer: Districts must accept transfer students who are children of school employees.
- Intra-district transfer: A district must allow children of school employees to transfer to the employee's school or a school in the district with early intervention services or preschool services.
- AIDS education must be taught at least once per year beginning no later than fifth grade.
- Every school district must develop a written policy on its role in preventing child abuse and must, within resources available, participate in a primary prevention program, develop a prevention program, or continue with an existing local program.
- All schools must provide a program of education for students who plan to pursue career or work opportunities other than entrance to a higher education institution.
- Schools are encouraged to offer financial literacy education.
- High schools are encouraged to include instruction on the Holocaust, and OSPI may prepare and make available instructional materials for guidelines.
- The Legislature established the Washington Civil Liberties Public Education Program, which provides grants to educate the public or develop presentations to schools or other interested parties. SPI must allocate grants under the Washington Civil Liberties Public Education Program.
- School districts must adopt and implement a safe school plan; the plan must include various policies and procedures and certification; and school districts must annually review the plans, conduct inventories, update information, and conduct drills.

The following laws are amended:

- To the extent funds are available, a school district that offers highly capable programs, must meet certain requirements.
- School districts are encouraged, rather than required, to meet minimum standards for a preschool program if a school district has one.
- A "traffic safety education course" is redefined as any course of instruction in traffic safety education approved by the local school district.
- SPI is authorized to establish rules of traffic safety education. Each school district must submit a report only in even-numbered years on its traffic safety program. If a district has a private school in its boundaries, to the extent funds are available, at least one class must be given outside of regular school hours if there is sufficient demand. By January 1, 2010, SPI must survey districts regarding the impact of the rules and

minimum hours of training and make revisions in order to reduce the burden on school districts.

- During the month of October, each school must conduct or promote educational activities for disability awareness, to the extent funds are available.
- During the week proceeding November 11, schools must have at least 60 minutes of educational activities suitable to the observance of Veterans' Day, to the extent funds are available.
- OSPI must assist others in establishing a coordinated prevention program for child abuse and neglect. The training for school staff by OSPI is voluntary unless funding is specifically provided for the training.
- Beginning July 1, 2011, the Financial Literacy Public-Private Partnership must identify strategies to increase financial literacy of public school students. A final report is not due until June 20, 2013.
- Each school board must have a policy that addresses threats of violence. Specific requirements for procedures are removed. OSPI is no longer required to adopt a model policy.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Does the state really need to mandate all these things, even when in many cases the items do not cost much and may be worthy of being done. This is a beginning of a conversation of what can be done. While the bill as written has not been completely vetted and is not ready to be passed into law, the direction the bill is headed, as well as the ensuing discussions, are welcome. It is critical to preserve statutes dealing with student achievement, civil rights, health, safety, and federal funding. Agency regulations should be added. The maintenance and food nutrition people are ready to work with the Legislature.

CON: Suspending the requirement that AIDS education must be taught annually is very painful. The amendments to the Veterans' Day requirement and disability awareness month need some work. Even though many districts provide early intervention services voluntarily, these services would have become a requirement in 2009. This bill suspends the requirement, which is hard to believe after all the hard work done to get it into statute. The nurses, early learning community, and sexual assault coalition want to offer their expertise on related programs. Repealing PE is a major structural concern. Holocaust instruction is not mandated and it is currently funded by private dollars, thus hopefully it will be preserved. People who have worked hard on bills don't have lobbyists to come down and testify on these issues. We pass laws to make the few who will not do the right thing, even if told. Suspensions will cause confusion. If we are concerned about costs, put a moratorium on the WASL.

OTHER: This is not a specific unfunded mandate issue, but rather an underfunding issue overall. The challenges are the unintended consequences – such as which child will miss out on a part of their education when a program is suspended. Use the principal as a filter, if a principal does not know about the mandate, it probably is not needed.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator McDermott, prime sponsor; John Altman, OSPI; Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators; Dan Steele, Washington State School Directors Association; Mitch Denning, Alliance of Education Association.

CON: Cassie Johnston, Cecile Lindquist, Wee Care Coalition; Lonnie Johns-Brown, School Nurse Organization for Washington; Zach Carstensen, Jewish Federation; Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition.

OTHER: Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals.